MUSLIMS & CHEESE

Exploring the Islamic Perspective on Animal-Derived Enzymes

Original Research

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Dar ul Ifta Ahl e Sunnat (Dawat-e-Islami)

Translation & Summary

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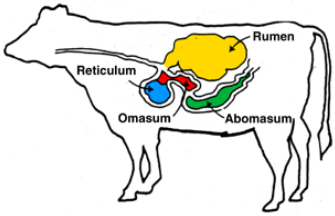
Muslims and Cheese

Introduction

One of the most popular food items enjoyed by people all over the world is Cheese. It's a dairy product made from milk whose production involves breaking solid curds from the liquid whey through a process called coagulation.



Rennet is one of the essential ingredients in cheese making. Rennet is an enzyme that causes milk to coagulate and form curds. It's made from the stomach linings of ruminant mammals like calves, lambs, and goats. It is obtained from the abomasum, which is the fourth stomach chamber. Rennet can also be obtained from bacteria or fungi that have been genetically modified to produce the enzyme.[1]

To make cheese with rennet, a small amount of enzymes are added to warm milk, which then coagulates over time. The resulting curds are drained, separated from the whey, and pressed to form cheese. For different types of cheese, different types of rennet are used, and the duration of coagulation and temperature also play a role in the final product's texture and flavor.[2]

Traditionally animal-derived rennet was the most commonly used coagulant in cheese making. However, due to concerns about animal welfare, the use of animal rennet has decreased.

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[1] Fox, P. F., McSweeney, P. L., Cogan, T. M., & Guinee, T. P. (2021). Cheese: Chemistry, physics, and microbiology. Elsevier.
[2] Guinee, T. P., & Wilkinson, M. G. (2021). Rennet and other coagulants used in cheese production. Cheese: Chemistry, physics, and microbiology, 77-102.

Nowadays, microbial and vegetable-based coagulants are becoming more popular as they are an ethical alternative for vegetarians and those who avoid animal-derived products. The use of microbial coagulants is particularly prevalent in industrial cheese production[3].

Islamic Perspective

Now coming to the main point of this article, "Is cheese made from animal enzymes considered halal or not?". The answer to this question can be quite complex. The detail is as follows:

If a *Halal* animal[4] is slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law, then the rennet obtained from it is considered halal by all Islamic scholars. Therefore, cheese made from it is also permissible.

However, rennet obtained from a *Halal* animal that has died naturally (carrion) or from a *Halal* animal that has not been slaughtered in the correct Islamic manner is also considered halal according to the view of Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah shower his mercy on him), and using cheese made from it is permissible. This is the chosen opinion by our jurists.

On the other hand, rennet obtained from a pig or any other Haram animal[5] is impure and haram, and using cheese made from it is not permissible.

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[3] Polychroniadou, A., Kondyli, E., & Katsiari, M. C. (2019). Cheese production: A review. Journal of food science and technology, 56(6), 2627-2638.

[4] Whose meat is permissible to eat given it's slaughtered according to Islamic rules.

However, if cheese made by non-Muslims comes to us, and it is not known from which animal the rennet used in making this cheese was obtained, then it is permissible to use this cheese.

Yet, if it is established in an evident manner that the cheese was made using rennet obtained from a Haram animal, then it is not permissible to use it.

Detailed Discussion

Some unanimous opinions

When a halal animal dies naturally (without *Zabiha*h), there is a difference of opinion among the scholars regarding whether the rennet obtained from it is pure/halal or not.

a. The three Imams of the Hanafi school (Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Abu Yusuf, and Imam Muhammad) unanimously agree that the parts of the carrion *(an animal not slaughtered according to Zabihah rules)* that contain life become impure after the animal's death. The parts that do not contain life, such as the hair, the bone which does not have fat/grease, and its milk, remain pure.
b. It is also unanimously agreed that if a halal animal has not reached the age of chewing cud but only drinks milk and it dies, the yellowish liquid substance obtained from its stomach, called rennet, does not contain life and should remain pure.

[5] Whose meat is impermissible to eat in all cases, such as wild animals, dogs, cats, etc.

c. There is also consensus that rennet is present in the stomach, which is such a part of the animal's body that contains life. Therefore, due to the death of the animal, that stomach also will be declared impure.

Following these unanimous views of Hanafi scholars, the next question is that, since because of the death of an animal, the container of Rennet (i.e., the stomach) is considered impure, then will that also make the rennet present inside impure or not?

There is a difference of views among our scholars regarding this.

Sahibayn's opinion regarding rennet of a *Non Zabihah* animal

Sahibayn[6] hold the position that if, due to the death of an animal, the container (stomach) in which rennet is found becomes impure, then as a consequence, the rennet should also be considered impure. This ruling manifests through the following scenarios:

- If this rennet is obtained in a solid state, only its outer and upper portion will be considered impure due to the impurity of the container. Therefore, by washing the surface, it can be purified, and afterward, using it to coagulate milk and consuming the resulting cheese is permissible.
- However, if the rennet is not obtained in a solid state but in a liquid state, then it will be considered impure, and it cannot be

[6] Imam Abu Yusuf and Imam Muhammad (may Allah have mercy on them)

purified. Consequently, using it to make cheese and consuming cheese made from it would not be permissible.[7]

Imam Abu Hanifa's opinion

The stance of Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah shower his mercy on him) is that due to the animal's death, even though the container (stomach) in which rennet is found becomes impure, the substance inside it (rennet) should not be considered impure.

This is due to the principle that as long as something remains in its natural habitat, it should not be deemed impure. Furthermore, when it is taken out of the container, it still should not be considered impure as long as it was originally pure. This is because merely bringing a pure substance out of its container does not make it impure.

This is in contrast to blood within the body, which was inherently impure in its original state. We did not issue a ruling of impurity on it since it was within the body (i.e., its original state). However, when it comes out of the body, it regains its original ruling (i.e., being impure).

This is the reason why the milk of an animal, even though it is derived from the area between blood and dung, is still considered pure and permissible.[8]

[7] Fath al Qadeer (1:96), Dar-ul-Fikr, Beirut
[8] Al Mabsoot li Sakarkhsi (24:27), Dar-ul-Marifa, Beirut.

Which is the chosen position?

Following a comprehensive examination of both perspectives and a thorough analysis of all the evidence, our esteemed jurists chose to align with the viewpoint of Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah shower his mercy on him). This is because firstly, our jurists have clearly mentioned that *Fatwa* (legal verdict) should be given on the opinion of Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah shower his mercy on him) in general cases.[9] [10].

Secondly, the noble and legendary jurists have explicitly chosen the opinion of Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah shower his mercy on him) in this case specifically. These jurists include the author of Fatawa Tatarkhaniya[11], Radd ul Muhtar[12], and Qadi Khan[13].

Thirdly, this opinion of Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah shower his mercy on him) aligns with the Ahadith as well. As it is mentioned in the Hadith, that "A piece of cheese was brought to the beloved Prophet ﷺ in Tabuk. He ﷺ called for a knife, mentioned Allah's name and cut it."[14]

A famous Hadith expert of his time, Shaykh Ali Al-Qari (may Allah shower his mercy on him) states: "Cheese was mentioned in front of Sayyiduna Umar (may Allah be pleased with him). People stated that rennet obtained from dead animals is added to it. Sayyiduna Umar

[9] Radd al-Muhtar, (1:72), Dar-ul-Fikr, Beirut.
[10] Fatawa Razawiyya (12:109), Raza Foundation, Lahore.
[11] Fatawa Tatarkhaniya, (1:443), Quetta.
[12] Radd al-Muhtar, (1:206), Dar-ul-Fikr, Beirut.
[13] Fatawa Qadi Khan, (1:20), Dar-ul-Kutub-Ilmiya, Beirut.
[14] Abu Dawood 3819

(may Allah be pleased with him) then said, "Proclaim the name of Allah and eat it."

Imam Ahmad (may Allah be pleased with him) has said, 'This is the most authentic hadith, among the various narrations, regarding the cheese of the Zoroastrians."[15]

Shaykh Ali Al-Qari further adds: "This narration contains evidence that the rennet extracted from the animal's stomach is considered pure because if it were impure, then the cheese made from it would also be impure, as cheese is exclusively made from it."[16]

After looking at these points, our jurists decided that Imam Abu Hanifa's opinion is most suitable.

Clarifying a doubt

It should remain clear that rennet obtained from a pig or any other prohibited animal is absolutely impure and forbidden.[17] This is because the respected jurists have stated that the ruling for rennet obtained from an animal is the same as the ruling for that animal's milk. Since the milk of prohibited animals is impure and forbidden, the same ruling will apply to its rennet as well.[18] Therefore, if cheese is made from such rennet, its use will not be permissible.

[15] Mirqat al-Mafateeh (2:201), Dar-ul-Kutub-Ilmiya, Beirut.
[16] Mirqat al-Mafateeh (8:130), Dar-ul-Kutub-Ilmiya, Beirut.
[17] Maraqi al-Falah, pg. 17, Maktaba Asriya
[18] Al-Mabsoot li-Sarakhsi, (24:27), Dar-ul-Marifa

What if the cheese is produced by non-Muslims?

Let's say cheese produced by non-Muslims comes before us, and it is not known whether it was made with the rennet of a halal animal or a haram one. Then in this case, as long as it is not certain that it came from a haram animal, it is permissible to consume it. Though it is possible that it contains rennet from a haram animal,

This is because the jurists have categorized cheese among those things for which the condition of *Zabihah* (ritual slaughter) is not required. Therefore, its ruling is similar to other food items other than meat.

In such items, the original state is considered pure. The general principle is that until there is certain knowledge of the presence of haram or impure substances, these items are considered halal. This is why the noble Sahaba (May Allah be pleased with them) consumed cheese made by Zoroastrians without any further investigation, as mentioned earlier.

Difference between meat and other food items

To gain a clear understanding of the fundamental rulings, we must distinguish between meat and non-meat food items. In the case of meat, the fundamental ruling is that it is inherently considered Haram. It becomes Halal through the proper *Zabihah* slaughter method.

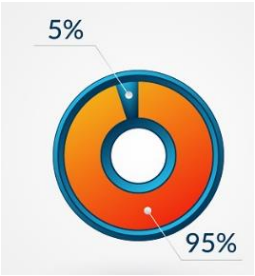
Conversely, non-meat items like fruits, dry fruits, vegetables, rice, and flour are inherently Halal; they do not require explicit proof of their Halal status. Mere doubts about the presence of Haram substances in these non-meat items do not render them Haram.

Shaykh al-Islam, Imam Ahmed Raza Khan (may Allah Almighty be pleased with him) was once asked about a specific type of sugar that has a rumor of containing haram ingredients. He said “It is permissible until it is ascertained that there is something impure or forbidden in the particular food item placed before us. Imam Muhammad (may Allah have mercy upon him), states, "We will consider it permissible as long as we are not certain about something being inherently forbidden."”[19]

However, it's crucial not to apply the inherently Halal rulings to meat items, and vice versa. These are distinct categories and should be treated as such. This means that Muslims should still conduct proper investigation and research before consuming meat items.

However, when it comes to non-meat items, including cheese, they will not be considered sinful if they do not conduct extensive research or investigation regarding its Halal status.

5% of cheese in the United States



Recent studies show that Rennet from calves has become less common for this use, to the point that less than 5% of cheese in the United States is made using animal rennet today. Most cheese is now made using chymosin derived

[19] Fatawa Razawiyya, (7:382), Raza Foundation

from bacterial sources.[20]

Our intention is not to assert the absolute accuracy of these studies, nor do we wholeheartedly endorse them. This topic remains open for further research, which we encourage our readers to undertake. Nevertheless, we raised this point here to provide reassurance to those who may still have doubts, assuring them that alternative options exist. If an individual remains unsatisfied with this research, they have the choice to explore vegetarian options for cheese, which seem to be widely available.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, we learned the following points through this research:

a. If a permissible (halal) animal is slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law, then the rennet obtained from it is considered halal by all Islamic scholars. Consequently, cheese made from such rennet is also permissible (halal).

b. Rennet obtained from an animal that has died naturally (carrion) or from an animal that has not been slaughtered in the correct Islamic manner is also considered halal according to the opinion of Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah shower his mercy on him). Consequently, using cheese made from it is permissible, and this is the chosen opinion by our jurists.

c. On the other hand, rennet obtained from a pig or any other Haram animal (whose meat is impermissible) is impure and haram. Consequently, using cheese made from it is not permissible in Islamic law.

[20] https://www.vrg.org/journal/vj2008issue3/2008_issue3_update_renet.php

d. If cheese produced by non-Muslims comes before us, and it is not known whether it was made with the rennet of a halal animal or a haram one. Then in this case, as long as it is not certain that it came from a haram animal, it is permissible to consume it.

We pray to Allah Almighty that He grants us the ability to adopt piety, fear him, and follow the path of our beloved Prophet ﷺ and the pious predecessors. Aameen.

This work was mainly translated & summarized from the research carried out by the honorable Mufti of Dar-ul-Ifta Ahl-e-Sunnat, Shaykh Sajid Attari حَفِظَهُ اللهُ. To read the detailed Fatwa in Urdu, please scan the QR Code:

Request to the readers:

If you find any mistakes in this translation, please email us at bilalsqadri@gmail.com. We would be extremely grateful to you.

~Abul Wafa Muhammad Bilal Sadiq al-Qadri al-Attari
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